The New England College of

Optometry

A New Vision for NECO

spring
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2007

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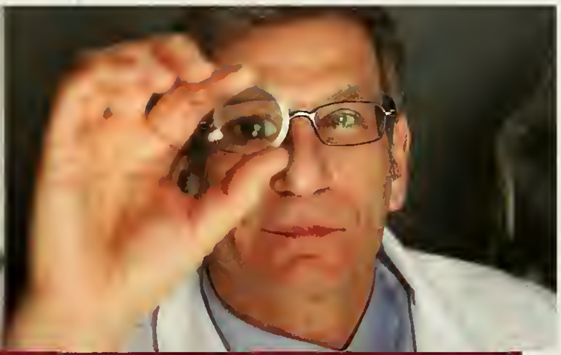

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NECO's new state-of-the-art flagship for clinical services – New England Eye Commonwealth – is a vision to behold. The $1.4 million optometry/ophthalmology practice provides a full spectrum of eye care, as part of a health care delivery system.

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President Elizabeth Chen is cooking up an ambitious agenda as the first woman and only the second non-optometrist to be named president of The New England College of Optometry. "I want NECO to be the college of first choice" for students considering optometry as a profession, she says.

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Steven I. Bennett '77, OD, has built the largest private practice in Ann Arbor, Michigan, serving 20,000 patients annually. In this alumni profile, he discusses how education – both his and his patients' – are critical in building and managing an unusually successful practice.

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letter from the editor

Dear Alumni,

This is an exciting time for NECO and those of you planning to come to the AOA's annual Optometry's Meeting in Boston this June. You'll learn some of the reasons why in this issue of Optometry.

You'll meet our new president, Elizabeth Chen (Page 6), a former CEO of two biotech companies, who is bringing a new vision to the College and is committed to making NECO "the college of first choice" for students considering careers in optometry.

If you haven't yet met President Chen at a professional conference or an alumni event, you'll have an opportunity at a reception at the College during the AOA weekend or at her inauguration, scheduled for later this fall.

A not-to-miss thing to do during AOA is a visit to New England Eye Commonwealth (Page 3), our new state-of-the art, $1.4 million flagship clinical facility. We'll have shuttle buses from the conference hotel to our new optometric/ophthalmology practice on the Charles River Campus of Boston University.

When it comes to practices, you won't find many as successful as Bennett Optometry, the largest private practice in Ann Arbor, Michigan with some 20,000 patient visits a year. Steven I. Bennett '77, OD, shares his views on how to build a growing business on Page 12.

Solid research is at the core of any great institution and some groundbreaking work on myopia is taking place in the lab of Prof. Debora Nickla, PhD (Page 16). You'll read about why her team's work regarding the vital role the eye's choroids plays in correcting myopia is generating national attention

Finally, we say good-bye to David Heath '83, OD, EdM (Page 20), who will be stepping down this June after 23 years of exemplary service to the profession and the College, most recently as vice president and dean of academic affairs since 1994.

Barry Wanger
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P.S. If you have a private practice, please consider putting Optometry in your waiting room after you've read it. Hopefully, the magazine will encourage some of your younger patients to consider a career in optometry.

NEW ENGLAND EYE COMMONWEALTH

A State-of-the Art Clinical Practice

BY PAT GALE

NEW ENGLAND
EYE
COMMONWEALTH

The future of optometry is on the second floor of a medical office building on Commonwealth Avenue, home to the Commonwealth Medical Practice of Boston Medical Center, Boston University Eye Associates, the clinical arm of their medical school's Department of Ophthalmology, and directly across the street from the new athletic center on the Charles River Campus of Boston University.

The new home of New England Eye Commonwealth is a state-of-the-art optometric/ophthalmology practice that provides a full spectrum of eye care, as part of a health care delivery system.

NECO students and NEEI attending doctors collaborate with the full array of health providers in the building to provide coordinated health care with ophthalmologists, primary care physicians, physical and occupational therapists, dentists, and other specialty providers.

"With the opening of New England Eye Commonwealth, we can now state that every New England Eye Network location is fully integrated into the health care sysrem," says Barry Barresi '77, OD, PhD, president of New England Eye Institute and NECO Vice President of Clinical Affairs.

The $1.4 million 10,000-square-foot Commonwealth clinical facility and an adjacent 5,000 square foot NEEI Network Administration Center, opened for business in January. Network Administration Center houses central administration for the NEEI Network and office and related workspace for NEEI professional staff, faculty and students.

In addition to 12 fully-equipped exam rooms, there are rooms for Pediatric Vision Therapy, Low Vision Rehabilitation, and a wide range of advanced eye care equipment, including digital imaging and the latest technology in glaucoma diagnosis. The facility's eyeglasses center has more than 2,000 frames, including many from the world's leading designers.

Along with the spaces designed for patient care, the adjacent Network Administration Center has a state-of-the-art conference room that opens the doors for more interaction with other professionals. "We're trying to set the new flagship up not only to be a resource for students but also for alumni, area doctors and program collaborators," said Mark O'Donoghue '82, OD, the Commonwealth Clinical Director. "We will be hosting continuing education programs and major teleconferencing events."

> "We're trying to set the new flagship up not only to be a resource for students but also for alumni, area doctors and program collaborators."
>
> MARK O'DONOGHUE '82, OD

During a tour of the new facility, Dr. O'Donoghue proudly pointed out to a recent visitor that his staff of NEEI attendings and NECO students, are providing an expanded range of services, including laser vision correction evaluation, contacts lens and cornea services, low vision/rehabilitative services, consultative ophthalmology, and pediatric care.

He said New England Eye Commonwealth currently has a base of 9,000 patients and expects to grow through referrals from alumni and other area optometrists, a patient education program, and a marketing campaign to friends and families of current patients, Boston University students, faculty, and staff, and area residents.

Like the former Fenway clinic, Dr. O'Donoghue said he anticipates that New England Eye Commonwealth will serve a broad spectrum of patients, including those referred by social service agencies.

"A number of the people we examine are underserved from the health care standpoint, so we see a lot of initial presentations of many different ocular diseases," Dr. O'Donoghue said.

The bottom line for the move to Commonwealth Avenue, Dr, Barresi said, is a more robust learning environment for the entire NECO student body and an increase in prestige for NEEI, the college's clinical system.

A New Vision for NECO

BY ELIZABETH MEHREN

It was a big holiday dinner, and Elizabeth Chen was entertaining on what most mortals would consider a rather grand scale. Then again, whipping up a perfect repast for 30 people is no more daunting to Chen than commanding a major biotech company or, since October, running the New England College of Optometry.

For Chen, preparing a multi-course meal is all about finding the most creative recipes, then adding her own distinct imprint. It's about respecting tradition, but also making room for brash innovation. It's about trying new ideas, and then being willing to move on if they don't work exactly as planned. Above all, Chen's personal style is about being inclusive—inviting several NECO students to her home, for example, when she learned they would otherwise be alone for the holiday.

She shrugged at the suggestion that her holiday agenda sounded awfully ambitious.

"If you're cooking for 15," she said, as if every single mother routinely cooked for a crowd, "you might as well cook for 30. What's the difference?"

Such is the calm confidence and steady determination that Chen, 43, brings to NECO's helm. She is the first woman to lead the institution, and only the second non-optometrist. With her MBA from Wharton and her BA from Yale, Chen transcends to the river-view office on Beacon Street from the fast-paced business arena of science and technology. She is so new both to academia and to the field of optometric education that when she got her first nibble from NECO, she said, "What's NECO?" Less than a year later, when Chen enthusiastically took the job, her 9-year-old daughter Grace told friends that "My mom is the president of the New England College of Optimists!"

Indeed, a strong sense of hopefulness is another Chen trademark. She quickly acknowledged the steep learning curve that awaited her when she took over at NECO. Step one was to install a vast erasable whiteboard along an entire wall in her new office. Chen turned it into a huge flow chart, with lists of long-range goals, immediate plans, people to meet and places to visit. It was more or less her recipe for NECO's future. As she explained: "I am a scribble-on-the-walls sort of person."

In her first 30 days as president, Chen attended 98 meetings—and that did not include phone conferences. To familiarize herself with

"We have the opportunity to create a new paradigm in the field of optometry."

ELIZABETH CHEN

“I want NECO to be the college of first choice...”

ELIZABETH CHEN

NECO–and, in the process, to generate ideas about how to improve her new professional environment–Chen visited one of the college’s six Boston-area clinics for homeless people. Chen went to the Perkins School for the Blind, where NECO personnel have worked for more than two decades, developing technology for the blind and the deaf that Chen believes may be of benefit to non-English speaking populations. She also went to the Cotting School in Lexington, where NECO students and faculty work with students with severe disabilities. “We’ve been there for 30 years,” Chen said. And she observed a NECO pediatric screening for kids in federal poverty programs.

As she explores her new field, Chen said she is never afraid to ask questions. “I don’t tend to ask stupid questions,” she said. “But I do ask provoking questions. I have a certain number of months in which I can ask these questions”–and with a laugh, she said: “About six months. Sometimes it stops people in their tracks when I ask certain things. That’s the good side to being an outsider.”

As for the downside: “I do have to prove myself with every sitting.” Toward that end, she said she is learning the nuts and bolts of the profession in “manageable chunks.”

Chen’s head-first immersion is part of her overall plan to raise more money for the school, elevate the institution’s regional and national profile and prepare students for successful careers. For Chen, that starts by assuring high passage rates – above the national average – of optometric board exams.

From her first day on the job, Chen made a point of connecting with students, emphasizing that what they learn at NECO will carry them through an important, lifelong career.

“As I say to the students here, I am developing a 40 to 50-year relationship with you,” Chen said. “I tell them: I want you to leave here as excellent doctors. I tell them the eyes are the gateway to the whole patient, so they should never forget the whole human. I want the students to come out of here as excellent, excellent clinicians, but not just for the eyes. I want research done to advance techniques. And I want them to teach others.”

Most of all, she said, “I want NECO to be the college of first choice for people coming into optometry.”

This kind of sweeping vision was part of what immediately impressed the search committee charged with finding a new president. Clifford Scott ’68, OD, chair, Department of Community Care, served on that panel made up of optometrists, business people, faculty and a student. One of the group’s primary aims was to find someone who could focus on external relationships, building ties with philanthropic groups, government and other academic institutions “that would lead us to become a force in this millennium,” Scott said.

When dozens of candidates were narrowed down, "Elizabeth stood out," he said. "Foremost, it's her presence. When she speaks–and she speaks very softly–people stop what they're doing, crane forward and listen."

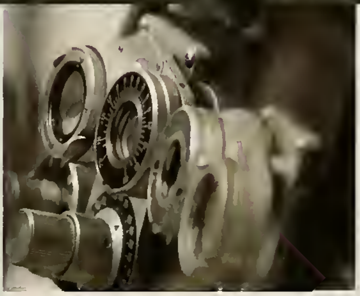
She is eloquent and she is thoughtful. She had done her homework when she came in. Despite neither having a background in the delivery of health care nor formal experience in academia, she impressed the Board by demonstrating a strong grasp of many of the key issues facing the school and the profession. She came up with a broad strategy of what her solutions would be.

Her selection came as little surprise to Reed Prior, a longtime associate of Chen's in a series of biotech ventures. Chen was in her early 30s when Prior made her CEO of a company called Marathon Biopharmaceuticals.

"She was this young, ambitious woman and she said 'I'll do it,' " Prior recalled. "Within 18 months, she made a horribly money losing operation profitable."

Her consistent pattern of success, Prior said, came down to leadership. "Elizabeth, unlike a lot of leaders, is not a prima donna," he said. "On the contrary, she has a phenomenal skill to bring out devotion from her subordinates, peers, vendors and even members of the board. She just has phenomenal leadership skills that come from trusting other people and letting them go down whatever path. She was very good at helping people understand where their strengths were and where they weren't."

> "She just has phenomenal **leadership skills** that come from trusting other people and letting them go down whatever path. She was very good at **helping people understand** where their **strengths** were and where they weren't."
>
> REED PRIOR



Chen learned adaptability at an early age. She was only 7 when her family moved from Taiwan to a one-bedroom apartment in Boston's Chinatown. Fluent in Cantonese as well as Mandarin, Elizabeth spoke no English when the family arrived in Boston. Here is what she most remembers: "It was January. It was so cold."

Her parents made it their business to make sure their five daughters prospered in their new country. Her father worked as a waiter, and her mother as a key punch operator at Shawmut Bank to support the family. All five girls earned advanced degrees.

"They would sacrifice luxury for themselves, so we could have the best," Chen said.

For her, the best meant a diploma from the prestigious Boston Latin School, followed by a full scholarship at Yale – and then, business school at the University of Pennsylvania. Chen said her parents always found a way to help their daughters achieve their academic dreams. In high school, for example, when Elizabeth announced she needed a typewriter, they somehow came up with the money for a spanking new Smith Corona. When she said she wanted to study in Europe, "they found a way to do it," she said. "They always had a sense of doing for others, and giving to others."

Chen, who is divorced, is equally devoted to her own daughter. Three days a week, her NECO contract allows her to leave work in time to meet Grace's school bus at 4 p.m. She also tailors her travel for weekends, so that Grace can accompany her—or stay with her father.

The priorities she learned as an immigrant child continue to compel her today. Chen happily drives a five-year-old Subaru station wagon. Her annual NECO salary

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>
> ELIZABETH CHEN

is more than ample, she notes—but substantially smaller than the annual bonuses of most biotech CEOs.

But as Chen points out, "What do you want to contribute to life and society? I want to leave this world a better place. What I do is not measured in monetary terms. It is measured in having a very definable impact on some aspect of the world. I have chosen health care and patient outcomes. And at NECO, I can also have an impact on students – now that's a very real and multi-generational impact that I take seriously."

Already at NECO, Chen is considering innovations, such as rural clinics and new types of internships. She wants better relations with ophthalmologists and other medical professionals. She is urging her faculty and staff to think up new approaches to teaching and research.

"Our goal is to expose students to as many different patient populations ways as possible, and to instill in them the goal of excellence as a whole-patient doctor," Chen said. "I want to encourage them to work with other fields, so they are an active part of other networks."

Chen is aware that she is describing a large professional meal plan here—not unlike her home banquets for 30 people or more. Again, she is at once preternaturally serene and entirely realistic about her goals.

"I view this as a 10-year project," Chen said. Then, borrowing from her backgrounds both in business and as a new settler in America, she continued: "we have the opportunity to develop a new paradigm in the field of optometry. It will mean we will have to build a new bank account. But I am an immigrant. Since when is that a problem?"

Here at NECO, sipping Chinese tea in her office above the Charles River, she said: "This is a new language, a new culture. Well, I've done that before."

ALUMNI PROFILE

Growing a Large Practice

BY SHERRY BAKER

When it comes to building a large and successful optometric practice, Steven I. Bennett '77, OD, FAAO, could write the book. His team of 45 employees, including five optometrists, provided care for nearly 20,000 patients last year and is the biggest private practice in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

His not-so-complicated secret: a strong emphasis on education – his own and his patients. The still athletic-looking optometrist regularly participates in clinical studies, consults with contact lens firms, gives lectures on contact lenses, and sees patients for about 35 hours a week.

In his downtown office, Dr. Bennett is a teacher as well as a practitioner – investing time in explaining eye health, options in vision correction, and new technologies to his patients.

"Everybody does the same stuff, turns the same dials. But it is how you present the information to patients that is critical," Dr. Bennett explains. "I strongly believe in explaining to patients everything you do in an exam, what a retinal photograph shows, and the newest things you have that may help them. You don't want patients to leave dissatisfied because they can be satisfied anywhere. You want them to leave absolutely wowed at all the new technology, with a good understanding of their own eye health, and feeling they just had the best exam ever."

A case in point: Dr. Bennett enters an exam room and asks his patient, an athletic young man there for an eye exam, the same question he's been asking patients for almost 30 years: "How can I help you today?" It isn't a rote greeting, but a way Dr. Bennett opens a conversation about eye health and patient options.

The man hasn't been in for a checkup in almost two years. He explains that he broke his glasses while rock climbing and wants another pair. "That reminded me I should come in and see if I need a different prescription," he says. Dr. Bennett looks him straight in the eye.

"No. You are here because you want the health of your eyes checked. And you need to have them checked once a year," he says in a friendly but no-nonsense tone. "I'm here to make sure your eyes are healthy. While I'm doing that I will take a look at what is going on with your glasses. Doesn't that sound a little better?"

The patient smiles back, nodding in agreement. By the time the appointment is over, he has a detailed understanding of his current eye health and has learned about the newest options in vision correction. In fact, he leaves delighted to have been fitted with contact lenses he can wear for 30 days at a time and then throw away, a far more practical solution to his vision correction needs than glasses for a lifestyle that includes rock climbing and camping adventures.

Getting There from Here

The Bennett Optometry web site (*www.bennettoptometry.com*) proclaims "Over 50 Years of Excellence". Dr. Bennett , obviously, didn't start the practice as a toddler – his father founded it and Dr. Bennett put in time working for his optometrist dad as a teen. The experience gave him a desire to help people. "I knew I wanted to be in the medical field," he recalls. However, like a lot of young people, he was convinced he wanted to do something different than the family business. So after graduating from Michigan State, he applied to medical schools and moved to Boston, where he worked and waited to see where he'd be accepted to med school.

But fate, or perhaps karma as Dr. Bennett suggests, had other plans.

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STEVEN I. BENNETT, OD, FAAO

At that time, NECO was the Massachusetts College of Optometry, located on Newbury Street. "I was walking in Boston one day, saw the sign and walked in to see if anyone needed a roommate for the summer," Dr. Bennett recalls. "I just happened to run into the dean of admissions and we began talking. We had a great conversation and at the end he said, 'if med school doesn't pan out, send me an application and you'll get in.'"

After working in a Boston area hospital, Dr. Bennett decided that although he still wanted to be in the medical field, he definitely didn't want to be an MD, constantly on call and faced with life and death issues daily. So he sent in an application and was accepted at what is now NECO.

"It was an instant 'fit' for me. I loved learning in the classroom in the morning and then applying that knowledge in the clinic in the afternoon," he says. "I was also familiar with the subject, having worked in my father's office. In fact, after a couple of years I had my optician's license while still in school and I was asked to teach a couple of college classes in opticianry."

A rotation at Walter Reed Army Hospital in Silver Spring, Maryland, resulted in another fortunate turn of events as he met an ophthalmologist from the University of Michigan who was so impressed with the young optometrist's knowledge and enthusiasm that the physician asked Dr. Bennett to start a low vision clinic at the University of Michigan. Soon Steven found himself home in Ann Arbor, working part time at the university as the first optometrist on staff at the university's Kellogg Eye Center and also working, for 10 years, back in his father's practice. Eventually, he left the university, bringing his low vision work into his father's practice.

GROWING, CONSOLIDATING, THRIVING

When Dr. Bennett senior retired six years ago, his son took over the entire operation, rearranging the practice and closing one of three offices. "Consolidating has allowed us to concentrate more on the professional side and to expand our clinical research. It has worked well. We are even more profitable with one less office and we're still the largest practice in Ann Arbor," Dr. Bennett points out. There are 45 employees in all, including five optometrists on staff.

Bennett Optometry includes a low vision clinic as well as a children's vision therapy clinic (headed by two pediatric optometrists) and a contact lens clinic where investigative work, including FDA trials and clinical studies, is conducted in conjunction with contact lens companies. In addition, Dr. Bennett also runs a speakers bureau for several contact lens companies, traveling around the country talking about new advances in contact lenses twice a month at continuing

"You may be able to handle the professional and business side when you first start out, but you can't grow and do them both well."

STEVEN I. BENNETT, OD, FAAO

education credit programs. "I also frequently talk about practice management," he notes. "Even though it isn't officially incorporated into my talks, it always ends up in discussions. I've been doing this for almost 30 years and I am glad to share my thoughts about what's worked for me."

Practical Practice Management

One of the most important ways to successful build a practice, he explains, is to learn how to effectively forge a relationship with patients based on communication. "In today's society, optometrists are the primary caregivers of eye health. At the beginning of the exam I tell patients I may give them more information than they want because it is important that they understand everything about the exam and, incorporated into this discussion, are options," he says.

"I think one of the big mistakes optometrists make is, if they have a contact lens patient, they don't discuss glasses. And, if they have a glasses patient coming in for eye exam, they don't mention contact lenses. I've heard optometrists say 'oh, that takes too much time' but it really is only a few minutes to ask the right questions. We need to give patients options – whether glasses, contacts or laser surgery. For example, I've found about 20 percent of my patients who wanted LASIK (laser-assisted in situ keratomleusis) surgery can be fitted with contacts and they are very happy with this option."

Dr. Bennett also advises optometrists to stop trying to do it all when it comes to the business side of their practice. "You may be able to handle the professional and business side when you first start out but you can't grow and do them both well. When I took over from my father, one of the first things I did was to hire a director of operations. She had absolutely no medical/optometric experience but she is a solid business person. The first year she was with us, she made her salary back in just rearranging the employees and cutting out overtime," he says. "My advice to young optometrists is to even use a consultant if you can't afford to hire a full-time office manager right away. But don't try to do everything yourself as your practice grows or you can actually stifle your growth."

Personal and Professional Future

Dr. Bennett sees many new optometry graduates "going commercial", working for large mall-based optometry operations, instead of entering independent practices. "Part of the reason is they have so many loans when they get out of school and many new grads also just expect a lot more financially sooner," he notes. "I look for doctors who have already done the commercial side and know what it is like and want to have the autonomy of really working for yourself and establishing long term relationships with patients – which I've found is a key to building a successful practice. In the commercial, mall-type operation, a patient rarely sees the same doctor twice."

Dr. Bennett, like his father before him, is committed to staying abreast of all the latest developments in his profession. "Medical technology is being incorporated more into optometric offices and we have new materials making contact lenses much safer and able to fit all sorts of lifestyles," he comments. "The medical side of optometry will continue to grow in the future, too."

Outside of his busy practice, Dr. Bennett enjoys traveling with his family-- his wife Claudia and sons Cole, 14, and Alec, 12. For 25 years, he's also joined three buddies for a yearly bike trek around the U.S., an adventure he calls his "passion."

He admits he's reaching a crossroads of sorts in his life and would like to cut down on his patient load some to concentrate on the clinical side more. " But I have a very loyal and large patient base , some even come to see me from Europe, and they want to make sure I am not retiring," he says. "And I'm not, not any time soon. This is a very exciting time to be an optometrist."

Seeking a Cure for Myopia

By Eileen McCluskey

The humble chicken may hold the key to curing a mounting medical problem – myopia.

Because the birds' eyes change so rapidly and dramatically to correct defective vision, they make excellent research models for Debora Nickla, Ph.D., associate professor of biology, and her team. Nickla, whose research in myopia has garnered national attention recently, has used newly-hatched and young White Leghorn chicks to discover a vital role the eye's choroid plays in correcting the troubling visual impairment.

Nickla says she has always been interested in vision biology, and she finds myopia particularly captivating. "Cases of myopia have escalated to epidemic levels in Eastern Asian countries," she notes. "Pathological myopia is a major cause of blindness. I'd like to think that our research will help us find ways of preventing or curing this condition."

The signs appear hopeful for such an outcome. With insights Nickla and her team continue to uncover about the effects, using various drugs, on choroidal thickness and ocular growth, clinicians could replace procedures such as Laser-Assisted In-Situ Keratomileusis (LASIK) surgery for myopic patients. They could instead administer a drug, which might correct the problem by causing the choroid to thicken and the eye to slow its growth.

Nickla started studying ocular growth while working toward her Ph.D. in biology at City College of the City University of New York in Manhattan. She conducted her thesis research on ocular circadian rhythms and scleral growth under Biology Professor Joshua Wallman. "He is the scientist who discovered the chick model of myopia," she points out.

In 1995, David Troilo, professor of biology – who also earned his Ph.D. in Wallman's lab – recruited Nickla to NECO's Myopia Research Center. Here, one of her focus areas has been the choroid, the vascular coat between the sclera and retina. "Until recently, the choroid was thought to just supply blood," she says, "but now we think it is also involved in regulating ocular growth."

Her painstaking studies of chicks' choroids and how they might influence eye growth began soon after her arrival at NECO. Then in 2001, she received a $650,000, five-year grant from the National Institutes of Health's National Eye Institute – which covers her salary as well as two post-doctoral positions, other laboratory staff, and all of Nickla's research equipment.

The grant also contributes to NECO's standing as one of the top two research-oriented optometry schools in the nation, with external funding in the past twelve years exceeding $15 million. "NECO is committed to expanding basic and clinical research," says Nickla. "President Elizabeth Chen has pledged her full support in the success of this mission."

In her lab, Nickla and her team – typically comprised of several masters students and another member of NECO's faculty – have used positive, negative, and diffuser lenses to manipulate eye growth. The lenses – which cover one eye on each bird – slip inside a plastic ring that is glued onto Velcro, which easily sticks to a matching Velcro ring glued to the feathers around the chick's eye. It is simple to change or clean the removable lenses. In one procedure, Nickla covered the chick's eye with a positive lens that focuses the image in front of the retina, essentially fooling the eye into believing it is myopic.

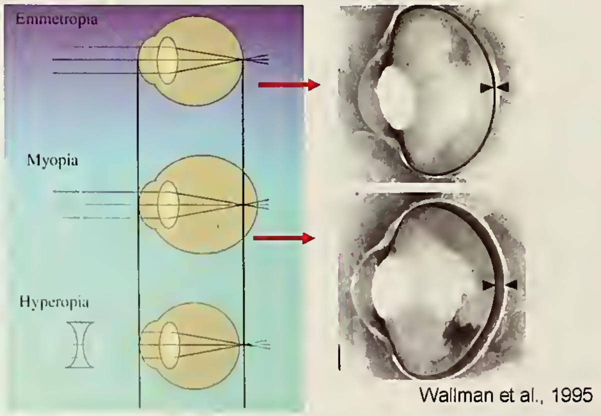
Every day, Nickla and her team took multiple measurements of each of the eye's layers to see the changes that occurred. A high frequency ultrasound device generated precise traces of the length of the eye's various layers, allowing Nickla to see even the most minute changes in choroid thickness and eye size.

Nickla found that over the course of just a few hours, the myopic chicks' choroids had grown thicker – by as much as one millimeter – correcting the myopia by pushing the retina closer to the image. When the chicks' eyes were freed of the myopia-producing lenses, their choroids shrank back to the original thickness. Across the hall in Troilo's lab, the primate model he studies has shown similar, if less dramatic, choroidal changes.

In another unanticipated turn, Nickla has discovered that as the choroid expands, evidence suggests that it sends biochemical signals that inhibit the eye's growth – another myopia-correcting strategy. "This two-fold mechanism could prove very helpful in developing medications, down the road, that prevent or correct myopia," Nickla says. "And we believe these chemical signals, which may include those produced by nitric oxide, will prove to be similar in primates. We are looking into this now, using a variety of drugs that work on different molecules.

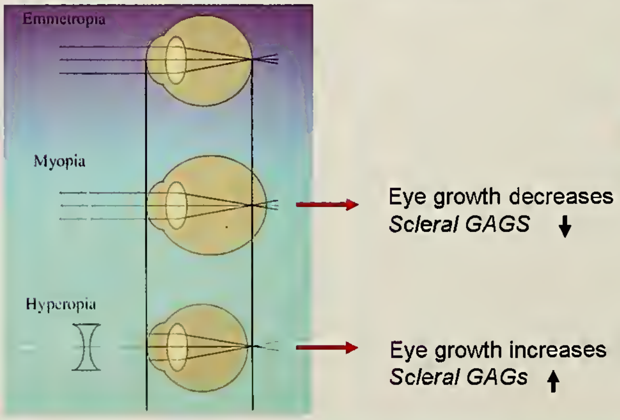
The same high-frequency ultrasound equipment that revealed the surprising changes in the choroid also show minute

Changes in choroidal thickness form the *rapid* part of the compensatory response to defocus in chicks



Wallman et al., 1995

These responses are consistently associated with changes in the rate of ocular growth (slow mechanism)



adjustments in the eye's axial length over the course of the day. "Normal eyes grow during the day, while the choroid thins," Nickla explains. "At night, the opposite occurs, with the eye contracting slightly while the choroid thickens." These diurnal rhythms change when the eye is growing faster or slower than normal, so it is possible that this information could lead to time-of-day-related treatment therapies.

"The most exciting thing," says Nickla, "is that we found the same rhythms in our primate model, the marmoset – and others have found these rhythms in humans, as well."

Her colleagues consider Nickla's research intriguing. When the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) held their annual meeting in May, 2006, Nickla was asked to present her findings in the conference's special session. "I felt very honored," Nickla says, "especially when hundreds of people attended the session – on a Sunday morning. People are very excited about this topic, because in eye research, myopia is such an important issue. We still face a lot of intriguing questions, so people want to know what we've learned lately."

Of course, large questions remain. For example, it is not yet known whether nitric oxide mediates the choroidal thickening response or the ocular growth inhibition. "And, whichever molecules are involved, which ocular tissues participate in the growth response?" asks Nickla. "This is the current $6 million question. We're exploring a variety of drugs for their effect on different ocular cells and tissues."

When might clinicians use the results of all this labor? "It's very hard to say," says Nickla, "but five or ten years could see clinical applications."

DAVID HEATH '83, OD

A NATIO

BY LISA BOEHM

After more than two decades of service to The New England College of Optometry and to several generations of students, David A. Heath '83, OD, Ed.M. is stepping down as Vice President/Dean of Academic Affairs to pursue new career opportunities.

Dr. Heath has agreed to act as Special Advisor to the President for Transition Planning through the end of June as President Chen crafts a new strategic course.

"Throughout his tenure, David has played important roles in the vision and leadership of the College, and I greatly value his advice and have utmost respect for his integrity, wisdom, and passion for the profession of optometry," said President Chen. "We are fortunate that he has agreed to continue to work with us as we build a new plan for the future."

The College underwent significant developments in recent years, proudly capturing both national and international recognition. During the Heath years – in which he shared the spotlight with Presidents Larry Clausen, OD, and Alan Lewis '65, OD – new student applications rose by 60 percent and the College increasingly became a leading choice for entering students.

"Our accomplishments during the past 12 years have been tremendous and while I am proud to have been in a leadership role, our achievements reflect the talents and aspirations of every member of this community," Heath wrote in a letter to the NECO community.

"We all share the credit for the positive accomplishments of this institution," stated Heath. "Let us celebrate the work that we have done together."

Dr. Heath played a catalytic role in the growth of NECO since he began his professional career here as a member of the faculty in 1984. As Vice President/Dean of Academic Affairs since 1994, Dr. Heath's management umbrella has involved all aspects of academic and technology strategy, research, international programs, student affairs, and program development.

During his tenure, Dr. Heath led the college community in the first comprehensive curriculum review in 25 years. Everything changed, from the academic calendar structure to the integration of basic and clinical sciences and the early immersion of students in patient care.

The curriculum review team set new standards, with a goal of integrating clinical education into patient care without compromising the quality of care patients received. This philosophy was a dramatic departure from the traditional model in which students were assigned patients later in their education and viewed patient work as educational labs.

The curriculum review team also introduced new forms of pedagogy and increased the use of technology. The goal of this extensive review effort produced a curriculum that is both contemporary and anticipates future trends in education and health care delivery. In 2001, Dr. Heath earned The Jack E. Bennett Award for Innovation in Education by the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry for his leadership in curriculum development on a national level.

NAL LEADER

Research was another high priority for Dr. Heath who saw research funding jump from $90,000 to more than $2 million a year, enabling the College to generate new knowledge for the profession, attract first-rate faculty, and increase the intellectual vitality of the community. With this growth in research, the College established the first graduate research degree program – the Master of Science in Vision Science – it's first new degree program since the 1960s. This mission continues as the College works towards a joint O.D./Ph.D. degree program with neighboring Boston University's School of Medicine.

His work beyond U.S. borders helped to bolster the College's reputation as a world leader in optometric education and research. Under his guidance, the Center for the International Advancement of Optometry (CIAO) was born, promoting optometric education and eye care delivery to thousands of people and adults in more than 20 countries. Over the years, the international mission has become an integral part of the College's values, woven throughout the overall educational strategy.

Dr. Heath received special recognition from the Chinese central government for his extensive work in China. He worked closely with the Wenzhou Medical College in China's Zhjiang Province, creating the first graduate level healthcare, international joint degree program in modern China. In 2002, he was named Honorary Director of the National Optometry Research Center by the Ministry of Public Health, Peoples Republic of China. He frequently keynoted ophthalmology and optometry conferences and received an award from the City of Shanghai for a keynote address delivered last spring.

"It takes a team effort to make a college such as ours into an international leader in optometric education," added President Chen, "but it takes an individual like David to promote the vision and optimize resources that are so critical to driving our success."

"Our achievements have benefited our students, the profession, and the global community," said Dr. Heath. "It's these accomplishments, added to our strong sense of community, that make us unique and, ultimately, the reason students choose to come here.

The time is right for me to leave my work at the College and allow the community to continue its growth and development. The New England College of Optometry is an institution of distinction with a rich history and many strengths to build on in the coming years."

BULLETIN: State University of New York Chancellor John R. Ryan has announced that he will recommend to the SUNY Board of Trustees that Dr. David Heath be named president of the SUNY College of Optometry. "Dr. Heath's innovative approach and strategic focus to management, his rigorous training and education, as well as his demonstrated success as an academic leader make him the ideal choice to be the president of the College of Optometry."

alumni classnotes

Jonathan Goldman '75, San Francisco, CA, has joined San Francisco's Project Inform as their AIDS Treatment Hotline Manager. Since 1985, Project Inform, a national, non-profit agency has established a legacy of grassroots activism and a vision of hope for those living with or affected by the virus.

Ron Siwoff '77, Morristown, NJ, was featured this fall on the popular ABC reality TV show, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition. Siwoff was asked by the show to volunteer as an eye consultant for the family members, born with the hereditary disease aniridia. Dr. Siwoff recognized the difficulties of designing a home that would meet the family's unique needs and offered to help the design team. He noted that the house had too many lights for a family that was sensitive to glare.

Bezalel Schendowich '78, Jerusalem, Israel, has formed the Jerusalem Optometric Society. The JOS provides local and frequent informal continuing education for the professional community. She is serving as chairman and education coordinator. More than 100 optometrists and optometry students are part of the JOS network.

Eli Peli, '83, Boston, has been awarded the Lighthouse International's 2006 Pisart Vision Award. This award recognizes individuals who have made noteworthy contributions to the prevention, cure or amelioration of sever vision impairment or blindness. Dr. Peli has received international recognition as an acclaimed scientist, inventor, engineer and clinician in eradicating low vision problems.

Denise Thomas Wilcox '85, Doylestown, PA, practices low vision at the Bucks County Association for the Blind in Newton, PA. She has been appointed to a four-year term on the Pennsylvania Board of Optometry by Gov. Ed Rendell.

Susan Primo '85, Atlanta, GA, has been awarded a four-year, $1.4 million NEI RO1 grant to study an innovative method to increase glaucoma compliance. She will work in collaboration with the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University.

Kathleen Zinzer McCarthy '93, Wilmington, NC, and husband Brett welcomed a son, Brendan, in June. He joins his big sister Reagan who is 2 years old. Kathleen have recently moved from Nashville, TN.

Edward Lancy '96, Struthers, OH, practices at Sears Optical in Youngstown and is governor of the local zone of the Ohio Optometric Association for 2007. He is also treasurer of the Struthers Lions Club and coaches mush ball. Dr. Lancy and his wife, Gidget,, have two children, Sabrina and Ryan.

John Rathjens, '96 and Robin (Pratt) Rathjens '99, Waterbury, CT, welcomed their son Anton William on May 21, 2006. They are currently partners in practice together in Milford and Waterbury Connecticut.

Corrine Como '97, recently married, and is an optometrist at Optometric Associates in Bridgewater, NJ. She and her husband, George Bengzon, reside in Chestern, NJ.

Lorie Lepley Parks, '99, Sidney, ME, and her husband Michael welcomed twin boys, Luke Michael and Ryan Christopher, on March 15, 2006. They join big sister Caitlin, who is almost 5 years old. Lorie and Mike both continue to work for Maine Eye Care Associates.

Anna Tsolakos Georgacopoulos '01, Lowell, MA, and her husband have one daughter Anna (2 years old) and another was due around Thanksgiving. She is currently working in Havermill, MA.

Stacy Hamlet '01 and Jason Griffith '01, Thousand Oaks, CA, are married and have two children; Connor, born in August 2002 and a daughter, Miranda, born in January 2005.

Mile Brujic '02, Bowling Green, OH, practices at John T. Archer and Associates in Bowling Green and Allen-Auglaize Care Center in Lima. He is governor of the local zone of the Ohio Optometric Association for 2007. Representing over 1,300 optometrists, the Association promotes high quality eye and vision care for the residents of Ohio.

Nina Nghi Doyle '03 serves as chairman of the Senior Vision Awareness Campaign in Maryland, sponsored by the AOA. She was named the state's OD of the Year in 2006 and works for Family Eye Care in Crofton, MD. Her specialties are in ocular disease and low vision.

Patrick Scott '06, Boston, is a graduate student in the anatomy PhD program at Boston University and has recently been awarded the Arnold Prize in Anatomy. The prize is presented annualy the department of anatomy/neurobiology to an individual who demonstrates "great overall care of their cadaver and exceptional dissecting skill."

Nancy Coletta, OD, PhD presented a poster entitled "Visual acuity at low luminance in myopia" at this past Fall Vision Meeting in Rochester, NY. This work was co-authored by Meritza Frericks (OD2) who was sponsored by the NEI T35 summer research program.

Li Deng, PhD published "A modified asymmetric Simes procedure for multiple tests of significance" Proceeding of Joint Statistical Meetings Probability Section CD-ROM. In addition, "Nature of Astigmatism Associated with Experimentally Induced Myopia or Hyperopia in Chickens," by Dr. Deng and Chea-Su Kee, appeared in Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics.

Jane Gwiazda, PhD co-authored "Role of Parental Myopia in the Progression of Myopia and Its Interaction with Treatment in COMET Children," which recently appeared in Investigative Ophthalmology and Vision Science.

Ji He, PhD published "A Comparison of Wavefront Aberrations in Eyes Wearing Different Types of Soft Contact Lenses" in Optometry and Vision Science.

Elizabeth Hoppe, OD, DPH was named Founding Dean for the College of Optometric Medicine at Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, California.

Daniel Kurtz '82, OD was the lead author on an article that was published recently in the journal, Investigative Ophthalmology and Vision Science, entitled "Role of Parental Myopia in the Progression of Myopia and Its Interaction with Treatment in COMET Children."

Bruce Moore '75, OD, was profiled in The Boston Globe. The story highlighted Dr. Moore's work in preschools in Boston and in Nicaragua and his long-time commitment to serving underprivileged populations.

Anne Moskowitz '93, OD, published "The Development of the Electroretinographic Oscillatory Potentials in Normal and ROP Rats" in Investigative Ophthalmology & Visual Science, and "Pediatric Clinical Visual Electrophysiology: A Survey of Actual Practice" in Documenta Ophthalmologica.

Guang-Ji Wang '92 published "Principles and Designs of the Iseikonic Lenses for Near Vision," in Optometry and Vision Science.

[illegible]

Jason Chin '04, OD has been awarded a fellowship to the American Academy of Optometry.

Gary Chu '95, OD, received a grant from the Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family Foundation for $35,000 for the Elder's Right to Sight Collaborative's CCTV Initiative. The grant will fund the installation of video magnifiers that project printed materials onto a closed circuit television at five area elderly housing facilities. Dr. Chu has also been accepted to the Blue Cross Blue Shield Massachusetts Foundation's Massachusetts Institute for Community Leadership program.

Steven Koevary, PhD, Interim VP/Dean of Academic Affairs and Chairman of the Department of Biomedical Sciences and Disease, has been awarded a $30,000 feasibility grant from Pharmalight, Inc. to continue his studies on the development of non-evasive ocular drug delivery technologies for the treatment of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic retinopathy.

Frank Thorn, '79, OD, has been awarded a $25,000 grant by the Wenzhou Medical College.

[illegible]

Chea-Su Kee, PhD has been named a full-time, tenure-track member of the Biomedical Sciences and Disease Department.

Welcome Home!

You're invited to the

2007 NECO ALUMNI RECEPTION

during the AOA Annual Congress in Boston.

When: Friday, June 29, 2007 7:00 p.m.
Where: The New England College of Optometry
424 Beacon Street

Transportation will be provided between the Hynes Convention Center and the College.

We Hope to See You There!

Honorees Dorothy Hitchmoth '96 and Paulette Demers Turco '77

Three alumni – **Murray Fingeret '76, OD, Dorothy Hitchmoth '96, OD, and Matthew Garston '66, OD** – were honored along with the past presidents of the Alumni Assn. and NECO during Alumni Weekend last fall.

The Association also elected **Philip Sutherland '86, OD, president, Nancy Carlson '77, OD, vice president, and Kristen Griebel '97, OD, secretary.**

Paulette Demers Turco '77, OD, was honored for her service as past president of the NECO Alumni Assn., and Alan Lewis, '65, OD, was recognized with the Alumni Assn. Appreciation Award for his distinguished service as President of NECO.

Dr. Fingert received the Alumnus of the Year Award, Dr. Hitchmoth was named Outstanding Alumna of the Year, and Dr. Garston was honored with the Distinguished Service Award.

Dr. Fingert is Chief of Optometry at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Queens, NY, President of the Optometric Glaucoma Society, and a clinical professor at the State University of New York College of Optometry.

In addition, he is chair of the Glaucoma Diplomate Committee of the AOA, is a member of the Board of Directors of the Glaucoma Foundation and serves on advisory boards for Carl Zeiss Meditec, Heidelberg Engineering, Pfiizer, Alcon, Welch Allyn and Allergan.

Dr. Hitchmoth is Chief of Optometry at the VA Medical Center in White River Junction, VT. She also has a private practice, Hitchmoth Eye Care Associates, where she specializes in eye diseases and disorders, particularly among the elderly and children. She has been a NECO faculty member since 1998 and was selected by students and residents as one of the top three clinical teachers for the 2006 academic year.

Dr. Garston is a NECO faculty member, a part-time staff optometrist at the Harvard University Health Service, and a senior staff optometrist at the MIT Medical Department.

He designed an implemented the first diagnostic pharmaceutical agent clinical certifying course in the United States in 1971 and has delivered more than 350 continuing education lecturers in the past 30 years on primary care, pharmacology, disease detection and treatment, diagnostic instrumentation, and contact lenses.

Class of 1996 celebrates at the Annual Dinner

The Foster Namias Society

The New England College of Optometry has received generous gifts from alumni and friends who included the College in their estate plans. Bequests, annuities and charitable trusts have become an increasingly important component of philanthropy. Donors who could not afford to give a major gift during their lifetime have found that they can provide for the institution through a planned gift or bequest.

In order to recognize donors who have included the College in their estate plans, the College has formed the Foster Namias Society. We are pleased to recognize the following individuals who have made planned gifts or intend to leave a bequest to the College. The following are welcomed as the first class of Charter Members of the Foster Namias Society.

Arthur W. Baker '67
Warren '26 and Stella Beider*
Larry R. Clausen
Carl E. Doughty '69
Joseph Feldberg '52
Eugene I. Fischer '61
Edith Heymans*
Otto Hochstadt, OD*
G. Burtt Holmes '52
Arnold Katz '50*
Lester Marcus '54*
Joseph D. Molinari '74
Andrew J. Portoghese '60
Harvey D. Rappoport '75
Gilbert F. Sellars '60
Maurice Saval*
Norman C. Spector
Melvin Stack '53
William R. Tolford '55

If you would like to become a charter member, please notify us that you have included the College in your estate plans. You may contact the Advancement Office at (617) 236-6285.

If you have included The New England College of Optometry in your estate plans, please fill out and return the inserted card.

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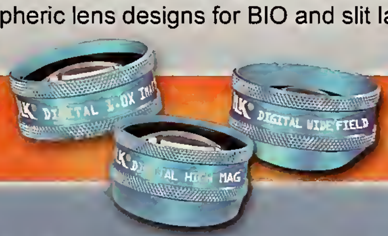

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William L. Jones O.D. -

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Walter Choate, O.D. -

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